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ABSTRACT

Urban environments are characterized by crowding, heterogeneous groups, disparities in opportunity between inner city and suburbia, concentrated hostility, complexity in organizational communication factors, depersonalization, dependence on mass communication, and high interdependence requiring balancing of conflicting goals. While communication principles are equally relevant despite the geographical area, emphasis and application of particular principles vary. In urban settings, three communication activities should be emphasized: (1) one-to-one interaction with emphasis on mutual growth through applications of empathic and problem-centered patterns developed by writers such as Ginott; (2) enhancement of social action and implementation processes through emphasis on principles related to the areas of communication anxiety reduction, organizational communication, and action campaigns; and (3) conflict management through games such as "prisoner's dilemma" and through applications of principles from persuasion, role playing, and consistency theories. Project approaches, utilization of electronic and other delivery systems, and relevant teacher training should be stressed in the context of lifelong education. (BLB)

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WHAT SHOULD BE THE UNIQUE ROLE OF TEACHING OR THE UNIQUE APPLICATIONS OF TEACHING IN DEPARTMENTS OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION LOCATED IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

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That's an intriguing question. It certainly is one to which we should turn our attention in these days as we come to appreciate the complexities of the urban situation and the problems they bring.

As I reflect on the teaching of speech communication in urban settings, several questions come to mind:

1. How does speech communication differ between urban and non-urban environments?
2. Are there really differences in the basic communication principles which we would apply in the two settings? If so, what are the differences?
3. Are there differences in the two settings which affect the application of these principles or the amount of emphasis which we give to some of them?
4. Are there some demands in the communication area, brought on by the complexity of the urban situation, which cry out for attention?

In attacking the questions, it's important to note some of the unique aspects of the urban environment. This presents somewhat of a problem as we attempt to set boundaries for that which we'll label urban. For the moment, let's take metropolitan areas with a population of 500,000 and over as the reference point. In those settings, we expect to find the following conditions:

1. High density of population with the attendant heightened tensions and other effects associated with crowding.
2. Hetereogeneity of interests, values and membership groups with the potential for hybridization of cultures and the stresses that arise when conflicting goals are sought by the different individuals and groups.
3. Great disparity between those in the inner city and those in suburbia as far as opportunity for access to jobs and services available within the total society.
4. Concentrations of persons who have become apathetic with perhaps more of these in certain areas within the urban environment, but not limited to any one or two areas.
5. Concentrations of persons who have become hostile toward some part of society or society in general.
6. Complexity of formal organizations with the attendant increase in the number of stages in the communication networks, the more limited access to decision makers by those seeking services and changes, and the delays in feedback to the person seeking information or action.
7. Depersonalization which occurs when individuals get caught up in the mass handling of goods and services, including the services of a large university.

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8. Increased dependence on mass and clique levels of communication. One's knowledge of the world and the participation in public affairs may be affected by the greater access to mass media and the impossibility of interacting on a face-to-face basis with any appreciable proportion of the populace within one's own urban area.
9. High degree of interdependence among individuals and groups growing out of the increased specialization of a technological society. That situation requires means of balancing conflicting goals and the consideration of solutions to problems in terms of their impact on all elements within the system.

Given those conditions, what aspects of the content covered by departments of speech communication would be pertinent? I would suggest that the basic principles we teach are equally relevant across settings which differ widely in degree of urbanization. Examples of those principles would include the ones dealing with relativity of meaning, selective perception, credibility or ethos, feedback, trust, and conflict resolution. Although the basic principles may be the same for the different levels of urbanization, the amount of emphasis given to each and the manner of application would vary across the different settings.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES TO BE EMPHASIZED

Keeping in mind the unique conditions noted earlier, I would propose emphasizing three sets of communication activities, which, admittedly, are not mutually exclusive:

1. One-to-one interaction (face-to-face and other)
2. Social action planning and implementation
3. Conflict management

One-to-One Interaction

In the urban setting, the face-to-face interactions on a one-to-one or small group basis do not center on mutual efforts to complete tasks for basic survival in the way in which that focus was facilitated in the agrarian setting. I would suggest that this difference in the settings influences the extent to which the interactions are mutually supportive and contribute to feelings of self-worth and personal satisfaction.

The greater diversity of interests, values and membership groups tends to put emphasis on competitive effort to get what "I want" irrespective of what you want or the effect it may have on you. The result is dissipation of energy in efforts to win out over the other person or group rather than combining energies to seek solutions which will permit both to achieve more of what they want and need.

This suggests that one of the roles for speech communication is to assist people in developing interaction patterns devoted to seeking new alternatives for mutual growth and development, rather than patterns emphasizing "I win, you lose," or "put-down" tactics. Development of constructive patterns of one-to-one interaction could provide a base for minimizing apathy and hostility, and for coping with the high level of tensions which animal studies indicate are associated with high population density. (Hall, 1966).

Some of the applications of psychology and social psychology exemplified by Ginott (1965, 1969, 1972); Berne (1964); Harris (1969), Glasser (1969); and Watzlawick et al (1967) may be useful guides for extending our work [illegible]ing persons develop communication patterns which contribute to the [illegible]elopment of meaningful human relationships.

One of our tasks in this area is to help people sort out the elements in the communication process which contribute to building or destroying relationships among persons. Along with that task we should help them see (experience) the effect which a given relationship has on any efforts to communicate and on the efforts we exert to analyze and solve problems, individually or jointly.

To avoid tensions, we often keep much of our interaction at a superficial level. We either are afraid or unwilling to take the time to learn about the aspirations of the other person, to learn about his hopes and dreams; to learn about his feelings of adequacy or inadequacy. We're unwilling to risk the demands of commitments beyond the superficial stage. Yet, our theory and our common sense tell us that to communicate effectively, we must "know our audience."

Ginott points out how often in interactions between family members we unwittingly or wittingly transmit messages which attack the ego of the other person. The impact of those interactions on attitudes, feelings and beliefs and the consequent impact on future communication may be partially illustrated by the following:

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

If a child lives with criticism,
he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility,
he learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule,
he learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame,
he learns to feel guilt.
If a child lives with tolerance,
he learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragements,
he learns confidence.
If a child lives with praise,
he learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness,
he learns justice.
If a child lives with security,
he learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval,
he learns to like himself.
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
he learns to find love in the world.

Dorothy Law Nolte

Ginott stresses the importance of showing sympathy for the other person's feelings. Unless he senses that we somehow appreciate how he feels, he generally becomes defensive and unwilling to listen to us at all. In some cases it may lead to the child running away from home, or the spouse running home to parents, or one person refusing to work with another person.

In situations involving error or personal injury, Ginott urges us to identify problems and solutions rather than condemning or criticizing the person for his act. The emphasis is on creating the condition for avoiding future calamity by looking for alternate courses of action which would be more fruitful for all concerned.

The importance of effective one-to-one interactions is amplified when we consider the number of these interactions involved in organizing action programs in the complex urban setting. Breakdowns in any one interaction very likely will have impacts on the whole system. My plea is that we give careful consideration to the ways in which patterns of interpersonal interaction learned from birth onward influence the way individuals behave in working with or against others in attacking community problems and in resolving conflicts. With patterns of life in the urban setting, the naturally occurring joint efforts to solve problems of daily survival by young and old, and of those with different racial, religious, and social backgrounds gets diffused almost to oblivion. We continue organized activities, but these lack something which comes with the spontaneity of need and action, it probably is the sense of working together to achieve something we feel is necessary and worthwhile.

I think we have an obligation to work with all segments of the public, and especially with teachers and parents in improving our communication patterns in face-to-face situations at the one-to-one or one-to-a-few levels.

Among the specific questions to consider are: How does one cope with the person who comes at him with a barrage of invectives? Does he reply in kind? If so, what will be the consequences? What are the patterns of interaction which contribute to apathy and hostility? Can these be altered or avoided? If so, how? What do mass portray as models of interaction and how much effect do they have on the patterns of behavior adopted by audience members, and under what conditions? Those may be worthy of a few hours of consideration.

Social Action Planning and Implementation

The extent to which a community action program depends on the effectiveness of a large number of recurring one-to-one interactions is almost staggering to consider. The task of planning, gaining support for and implementing action programs becomes mammoth in the urban setting. It seems to me that we have an excellent opportunity to assist people in understanding the communication process and techniques of communication in ways that will help them in their efforts to unite diverse individuals and groups to cope with the pressing concerns affecting all in the urban environment.

With the complexities of the urban environment, it becomes extremely difficult to identify, define and solve the range of problems which influence the extent to which people may enjoy the "good life." It's extremely difficult just to get a level of awareness and concern which is sufficient to stimulate an attack on a problem by those who are in a position to initiate action.

It seems likely that in order to get those in decision making positions to appreciate the concerns of people in other settings, it will be necessary to arrange for these decision makers to experience the situations in which the others live and work. In the agrarian setting this occurred more naturally and did not have to be contrived; the awareness of the plight of those in the community was widespread and the concern stimulated cooperative action.

Contributions to the social action process by departments of speech communication may range from work on communication anxiety, to organizational communication, to planning and launching action campaigns.

Communication anxiety may be a barrier to enlisting the participation of people in a community for attack on problems. Work by Ralph, McCroskey, Goss, Barrick and others has produced methods of helping an individual cope with communication anxiety in various situations in which he finds himself. These could be one-to-one situations, groups of various sizes, or large audience presentations with persons of the same orhigher status, or it could be participating in mass media presentations.

Another area is that of communicating to gain the trust of other individuals and groups so that cooperative effort is possible. Carla Eugster, working as a volunteer in the community of West Heights in a Maryland urban area, found that it took her about two years to gain the confidence and trust of people in the community. During that time she was involved in many aspects of what has been called a Construct for Social Action.

Developed by George Beal and Joe Bohlen at Iowa State University several years ago, the Construct provides a checklist of things to take into account in initiating and carrying out a social action program. Included in the checklist are: an analysis of the prior situation; problem definition; identification of needs; identification of legitimizers; and identification of persons and groups both inside and outside the community who may help with all steps in the process from initiating the idea through implementing and evaluating the action. Also included in the checklist are a number of techniques--surveys, exploiting crisis, basic education, demonstrations, comparing and contrasting, etc.--which may be used in all aspects of the social action process. Attention also is called to mobilizing resources, setting goals and means of achieving the goals, and the various action steps.

In the planning and implementation of social action, we keep looking back and ahead, reassessing where we've been and where we're headed, defining, analyzing, planning, taking action, and evaluating. This process goes on continually in a social action program which is solving the problems which were attacked.

Relating this to the context in which we have frequently worked in the speech-communication area, what we are suggesting seems to most closely parallel the persuasive campaign. In the Social Action approach, we focus on the problem in the community, then we ask what resources we need to solve that problem, including the communication skills which we must develop in order to get the problem identified, the solution developed and implemented.

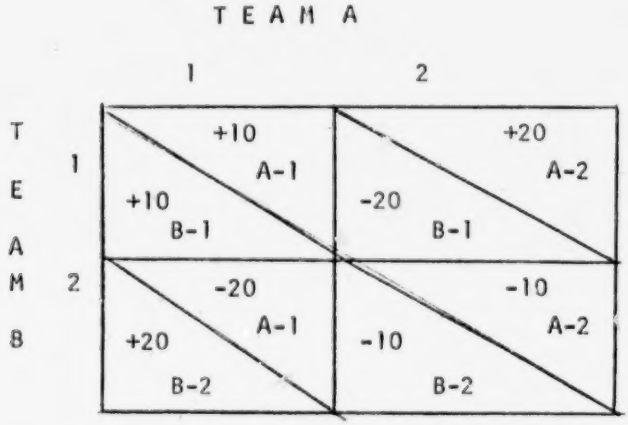
It seems to me that one of the greatest services departments of speech communication could render in all areas, but especially in urban areas, is to help people develop those skills necessary to initiate, participate in and carry out social action for the betterment of their communities.

Conflict Management

The third category, which we have established for looking at the uniqueness of speech-communication in the urban environment, is that of conflict management. If we accept the thesis developed by Hall in his book Hidden Dimension, we will consider that the increased density of population in the urban setting may be expected to lead to increased tensions and conflict. The possibility of groups with conflicting values and ideals moving to achieve isolation from one another, is minimized when we get the concentration of people which we find in urban areas.

One of the challenges which would seem to face us as we think of speech communication in the urban area, is how do we manage conflict so that it becomes productive in its outcome, rather than nonproductive or destructive. One of the devices which we have used in looking at communication and conflict situations, one which many of you may have used too, is the prisoner's dilemma game. This game allows individuals or groups to experience what happens when they get caught up in a zero-sum situation, i.e., I win, you lose, you win, I lose.

For those who may not be familiar with the game, the following brief explanation may provide a context for the points which may be derived from the game. Each team has a choice of either of two alternative decisions. The outcome of Team A's choice is influenced by Team B's choice. In the diagram below it may be seen that if both teams choose alternative "1", they both win 10 units (cents, dollars, or whatever the units represent).



If one team chooses alternative "2" while the other team chooses alternative "1", the team choosing "2" wins 20 units from the team choosing "1". It is quickly apparent that the choice of alternative "2" offers the opportunity for maximum gain and minimum loss. Usually both teams will soon choose alternative "2" and both lose 10 units.

Given the opportunity to talk things over, many sets of teams, but by no means all, will see that the mutual gain (both choosing alternative "1") is the better long-range strategy. But, frequently teams become so obsessed with beating the other team that cooperative efforts never occur. The same thing may be observed between groups in communities.

Playing the prisoner's dilemma game generates much data for analyzing communication in conflict situations. Trust breaks down and sometimes gets re-established. This provides the opportunity to talk about creating and destroying trust, using an experience they all have shared in the game. The communication cues and behaviors involved in the change in trust relationships may be identified and discussed. The whole process may be compared to happenings in action programs in communities. It's not unusual for those who have participated in the game to state that they had not realized how blindly competitive they were and the potentially detrimental effects to themselves and others.

It may seem obvious that both parties lose in the long run when an "I win, you lose", "you win, I lose" stance is maintained. The tragedy is that these kinds of strategies can destroy or even prevent conception of social action programs and produce damaging consequences for many persons. In the urban setting, the increased interdependence of residents upon others makes the strategy even more disfunctional than in areas where the level of interdependence is less.

At the individual level it may result in children running away from home; or it may produce continuing friction among family members, or in offices, or between teachers and students in school. Energy that could go into achieving mutual goals is consumed in contests which often have little more result than to maintain a high level of unresolved frustration among the parties to the game. The "I win, you lose" strategy also results in hoarding rather than sharing of information.

Within the speech communication departments, the materials on persuasion and argumentation offer one mode of conflict management. The approach which encourages focusing on problems and alternative solutions rather than ad hominem attacks is another factor in conflict management. Another approach may be to move to a higher level of analysis in seeking mutually beneficial outcomes. Role playing and role reversal are other techniques which may be useful in conflict management.

On the theoretic side we could look to the consistency theories -- balance, symmetry, congruity, and dissonance. These theories are useful in considering the use of tensions and conflict in bringing about desired change. It requires attention to viable ways of reducing the tensions generated, ways which yield the behaviors which the parties involved find mutually beneficial.

Among the situations which are perhaps most fraught with potential conflict are those where conflicting goals arise between siblings, between parents and children, between teachers and students, and between groups of differing social-cultural backgrounds. As may be noted, perception, meaning, trust and feedback are key concepts in looking at the breakdowns which may or do occur. Again, we may note that the basic principles cut across the situations, but the application of the principles may be unique to each situation. We also note that conflict management may be at the one-to-one level of interaction, at the small group level among members or between groups, and on up to the societal level in terms of number of persons involved.

OPPORTUNITIES

Today much is being written and talked about regarding poverty, race relations, equal rights for women, education, and ecology. Urbanization seems inextricably introwoven with those areas of concern. I'd like to suggest some things for us, as teachers, to think about in regards to those topics.

Project Focus in Teaching

A project approach to teaching would allow us to take an issue related to any one of those topic areas and cover the three categories of communication activity covered above. In working on the project, the students would be involved with one-to-one interaction elements, social planning and implementation elements, and conflict management elements. The laboratory materials growing out of such an approach are real for the students and can provide a sense of achievement and satisfaction from creating "real" solutions to "real" problems.

Lifelong Education

With the growing emphasis on lifelong education,* it would seem that the project approach offers fascinating possibilities. It can provide

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*A Task Force at Michigan State University has just released to the staff a preliminary report exploring opportunities in lifelong education.

the opportunity for young and old and those from different socio-economic strata to work together to solve common problems and achieve common goals. The line between formal (degree certification) and non-formal education becomes blurred.

Rather than course credits amassed as the basis for certification, the acquisition of specified behaviors, regardless of where they were acquired, becomes the basis for certification and degree granting. To what extent can we, within the project framework, have students of varying ages working together with adults, not formally enrolled, to consider a community problem? What would be the impact of such an approach on developing more effective communication patterns.

Delivery Systems

With the advent of new electronic equipment, the available delivery systems offer exciting potentials for us to incorporate into our teaching. We have opportunities far beyond the lecture and recitation approach of early classes, although we can still find plenty of that.

The basic process is still the same; we provide experiences, either "real life" or contrived, first hand, on-site, or recorded, stored and transmitted at some later time. The access to experiences via print, audio and video tapes, live electronic transmission and travel has skyrocketed during the last century. The possibility of 2-way video transmission for teaching is at our doorstep. The tools are available for us to develop a variety of delivery systems to use in our teaching efforts in urban settings. We must critically assess, however, which medium is best to achieve which goal. This involves deciding which of the senses are required for the experience. The feel of snow, e.g., requires on-site touch; no other sense can provide that experience.

Data on the use of mass media are available to guide us in using those media in the urban environment. Among the more recent findings are those by Greenberg et al (1970). One of their findings was that among one segment of the urban poor, TV viewing <u>averaged</u> 8 hours a day. These respondents also believed that what they saw on the TV entertainment shows as "true to life." This and other analyses on urban audiences would be helpful in planning and carrying out lifelong education in the urban areas.

Teacher Training

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for us to extend the practice of improved speech communication is in the training of teachers. If we could train teachers to encompass effective communication into all areas of study and to be models of effective interaction with their students, it would be a worthy achievement. All teachers should be able to suggest to students ways to improve their writing, speaking and one-to-one interaction, as well as, encourage the students to continually strive to improve their communication behavior.

Most of all, <u>we</u> should be models of effective communication.

Hopefully, I've presented some notions to stimulate our thinking about the teaching of speech communication in the urban environment. I hope that our caucus can develop some specific action proposals which we can start implementing, both long-range and short range.

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